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THE STATE OF TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN ENGLISH.

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BECAUSE THERE HAVE NOT BEEN ANY SWEEPING SHIFTS IN EMPHASES IN THE PAST DECADE IN THE PREPARATION OF SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHERS BY COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT IMPROVEMENTS ARE DIFFICULT TO CONSTRUCT. ALTHOUGH TRENDS ARE EVIDENT AND ARE BEGINNING TO BE MANIFESTED IN THE KINDS OF TRAINING GIVEN PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS, PROBLEMS REMAIN. EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY COURSES, ALMOST INEVITABLY REQUIRED, VARY IMMENSELY AND ARE ONLY INFREQUENTLY OF DIRECT VALUE IN TEACHING. FEW ENGLISH TEACHERS ARE REQUIRED TO TAKE COURSES WHICH PREPARE THEM TO TEACH MODERN ENGLISH GRAMMAR, COMPOSITION, OR THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, AND FEWER STILL ARE AWARE OF THE ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF RESEARCH BEING CONDUCTED IN THESE AREAS. TOO FEW COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES OFFER A COURSE IN PRACTICAL LITERARY CRITICISM FOR PROSPECTIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS, WHEREAS THE GENERAL COURSES IN EDUCATION REQUIRED OF MOST EDUCATION STUDENTS HAVE BEEN JUDGED TO BE OF PRACTICALLY NO VALUE BY A LARGE PROPORTION OF GRADUATES. GUIDELINES HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED BY PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, HOWEVER, AND IMPROVEMENT CAN BE EXPECTED. INSERVICE TRAINING IS HELPING TO RECTIFY THE FACT THAT HALF OF THE NATION'S TEACHERS OF ENGLISH DID NOT MAJOR IN THAT AREA. OVERALL, STEADY PROGRESS IS BEING MADE TO PROVIDE BETTER QUALIFIED ENGLISH TEACHERS FOR JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS. THIS ADDRESS WAS DELIVERED AT THE CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH EDUCATION (5TH, UNIV. OF GEORGIA, MARCH 20-APRIL 1, 1967). (DL)

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ISSUES IN THE PREPARATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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IN THE PREPARATION OF
SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS

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THE STATE OF TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS IN ENGLISH

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1.

Perhaps the best way to show what is happening in teacher preparation programs in English is first to describe typical programs of a decade or more ago and then to indicate the kinds of changes that have taken place or are taking place in forward-looking programs of today.

The majority of programs of the fifties consisted of a certain number of hours of general education, a certain number of hours of English (usually twenty or twenty-five or more semester hours in addition to freshman composition), a certain number of hours of education, and various institutional or state requirements such as work in physical education or a course in the history of the state.

Perhaps the biggest weakness of such programs lay in the lack of breadth in the English courses. English is a three-part subject. An English teacher needs to teach literature, composition, and the English language. In college in the fifties he usually obtained a reasonable amount of exposure to literature; very often, in fact, all his college English work except for the universally required freshman composition was in literature. He often had no study of language and no advanced composition. In a study published by the NCTE in 1961, it was reported that for secondary English teacher preparation only a fourth of the colleges required a course in the history of the English language, only 17.4 per cent required a course in modern English grammar, and only 41 per cent required a course in advanced composition. As for the literature studied, the book revealed that only one fifth of the programs specified the need for a course in contemporary literature or in literary criticism or critical analysis, and few institutions provided courses devoted to literature written for adolescents.[1]

An English teacher should know English, just as a science teacher should know science and a mathematics teacher should know mathematics. If a mathematics teacher was prepared to teach only one or two parts of his discipline--say geometry and trigonometry--he would presumably have difficulty in getting and keeping a job. Yet the majority of the nation's English teachers were reasonably well-prepared in only one-third of what they were expected to teach. They knew literature fairly well (though even here there were big gaps), but their knowledge of composition was only elementary and their knowledge of the history and structure of the English language was even more so, because many teachers had not studied it since their own days in high school. In the circumstances, it is no wonder that English was often the least-liked and least-respected subject in the school. Nor is it any wonder that students learned little about composition and about the English language, since they were

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[1]The National Interest and the Teaching of English. Champaign, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1961, pp. 60 ff.

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taught by teachers who themselves knew little about how to write or about the intricacies and the glories of the English language.

We must blame college English departments for such deficiences. Most college English professors are professors of literature. They usually know their subject well and teach it at least fairly well and sometimes brilliantly. And college students--English majors--enjoy literature. They voluntarily read widely and deeply. But a department that prepares teachers is shirking its responsibilities if it concentrates almost entirely upon literature, important though literature is. What is needed is a degree of balance, with at least some work in the theory and practice of advanced composition and with some up-to-date instruction in the English language.

The course work in education was by no means totally satisfactory either (and even yet has not been substantially changed). Although specifically required courses varied from state to state or college to college, they most frequently consisted of history and philosophy of education, educational psychology, general methods of teaching, and practice teaching. Opinions that graduates held of these courses were generally less than enthusiastic. In 1960, in California, 1,391 high school teachers answered the question "How important do you believe the education courses you took to obtain your credential were in making you an effective teacher?" Six per cent said "most important"; 44.7 per cent said "of some importance"; 42.2 per cent said "of little importance"; and 7.1 per cent said "of no importance."[2] A larger study, conducted nationally by the U. S. Office of Education in 1956-57, resulted in somewhat similar findings; the group involved here consisted of 7,150 beginning teachers. This study showed, though, that practice teaching was much more highly regarded than were education courses in general: 53 per cent found it "very helpful" in contrast to the 20 per cent who found education courses very helpful.[3]

James D. Koerner in The Miseducation of American Teachers (1963) took particular relish in quoting reactions of 100 teachers to their education courses. Here are two representative comments, from English teachers:

> I think education courses are a waste of time (bear in mind I had four general ones) as a preparation for teaching. (They) provide good cultural and historical knowledge, but almost nothing which can be beneficial in the classroom... You learn more psychology in a class in a week than you do in a semester course.
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> In general, I have found that the education courses I had to take (with the exception of six weeks of student teaching) have been altogether useless and totally irrelevant to the practice of teaching, which evidently cannot be learned from a textbook or a lecture.[4]

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[2]Gustav Albrecht, "A Survey of Teacher Opinion in California." Phi Delta Kappan, December 1960, p. 104.

[3]Ward S. Mason, The Beginning Teacher, OE Circular No. 664, 1956.

[4]Op. cit., (Boston, Houghton-Mifflin, 1963), pp. 110-111.

Since the 1950's, a number of innovations and improvements in English teacher preparation programs have been instituted and even more have been recommended. Curricular reform on the college level probably occurs even more slowly and deliberately than it does on the secondary or elementary level; therefore I cannot point to any dramatically sweeping shifts in emphasis made by all or most of the nation's colleges. But trends are clearly evident, and those trends I wish now to describe.

The most thoroughgoing treatment of English teacher preparation, for all academic levels, is the fifth volume of the NCTE's curriculum series, The Education of Teachers of English for American Schools and Colleges, edited in 1963 by Alfred Grommon of Stanford and contributed to by a large number of professional leaders. This volume explained what English teachers need to know and why, and described a number of existing programs that were strong in one or more of the most important aspects. Though a book like this never becomes a best-seller, this one reached many of the readers who could influence curriculum planning in their own colleges and sometimes in their own states or regions. In other words, the book contributed to a change in climate.

So did two other NCTE publications, prepared by what was called the Committee on National Interest. One of these, The National Interest and the Teaching of English, pointed out in detail the grave deficiencies in the preparation of teachers, such as those I have already mentioned. (The entire book, incidentally, was reprinted in the Congressional Record.) The second book, The National Interest and the Continuing Education of Teachers of English, was in fact a statistical study of what teachers believe to be their areas of greatest weakness. These two volumes were partially instrumental in attracting federal attention to the need for improving English teacher preparation, including post-baccalaureate work. The existence of summer NDEA institutes for English teachers, as well as the existence of certain fellowship programs and curriculum studies, is in part attributable to these two influential books.

I shall describe two additional studies and then turn to the characteristics of emerging programs.

In 1965, with financial support from the U. S. Office of Education, three organizations began a cooperative venture called the English Teacher Preparation Study. The organizations were the NCTE, the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC). The involvement of MLA in this venture is noteworthy, representing in effect an almost complete reversal of an MLA position in about twelve or fifteen years. At one time MLA was the scholar's citadel; the organization existed for the encouragement and publication of scholarly work in literature, and sometimes it appeared that the more esoteric and "pure" the research the happier was MLA. But gradually MLA leaders in the 1950's and 1960's concluded that they shared in the responsibility for teacher education. In the late 50's MLA cooperated with NCTE in several projects, including the Ford Foundation sponsored conferences on basic issues in the teaching of

English. This cooperation has continued, and since some college teachers of English are reached and influenced by MLA who have no connection with NCTE, the MLA involvement was very helpful in changing academic climate and in increasing academic interest in teacher preparation. As for NASDTEC, this small group consists of the persons in each state who work with the state department of public instruction on matters of teacher preparation and certification; they usually cooperate closely with the colleges in setting minimum standards.

This year the MLA-NASDTEC group published the results of two years of conferring, discussing and writing, to which hundreds of teachers, administrators, and professors of English and education contributed. Conferences basic to the document were held in all sections of the country. The resulting statement offers six guidelines for preparation. They concern personal qualities and breadth of educational background; the need for the English teacher on any level to have a balanced study of language, literature, and composition, plus specialized methods and a course in the teaching of reading; an understanding and appreciation of a wide body of literature; skill in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and an understanding of the nature of language and of rhetoric; an understanding of the relationship of child and adolescent development to the teaching of English; and methods of teaching English, along with supervised teaching.

Another study, of which I am director, is the Illinois State-Wide curriculum Study Center for the Preparation of Secondary School Teachers of English (ISCPET). Twenty Illinois colleges and universities, funded by the U. S. Office of Education and by local money, are cooperating in this study. One of the first steps taken by ISCPET was to agree upon a statement concerning the qualifications that every secondary English teacher should have. These are divided into knowledge of language, knowledge and skill in written composition, knowledge and skill in literature, knowledge and skill in oral communication, and knowledge and skill in the teaching of English. These are each sub-divided into "minimal", "good", and "superior" levels. Each college or university has committed itself to make, over a five-year period, those changes that seem most needed in its English teacher preparation program to enable it to meet these qualifications; each institution is committed also to conduct one or more special studies that may have national significance. These special studies include some on courses in the English language, critical thinking, oral interpretation, in-service programs, fifth-year programs, tests of teacher competence, literature, composition, student teaching and supervision, special needs of junior high schools, and others.

Mention might also be made of the work of some other groups: a long-standing NCTE Committee on Teacher Preparation and Certification; a young NCTE-affiliated organization, the Conference on English Education; and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, which currently has the responsibility for revising the accreditation standards followed by NCATE (the National Council for Accrediation of Teacher Education). It is significant that subject-matter groups are being consulted in the preparation of these revised standards, and that NCATE itself is no longer a completely education-centered body.

Now, what differences in preparation are beginning to appear as a result of these multiple efforts?

The most notable changes are occurring in the English courses. A modern program, without slighting or denigrating literature, includes at least a couple of courses in the English language. These most typically are modern English grammar and the history of the English language. Structural and transformational grammar are sometimes both taught, in relation to the traditional grammar that is still widely studied in the schools; even if a teacher is not employed by a school system that teaches one of the newer grammars, he will at least be well enough informed that he can correct some of the basic misconceptions of the traditionalists. Some teacher-preparation programs also have offerings in usage, dialectology, and lexicology (which includes semantics but also other parts of the study of words).

One or more courses in advanced composition are also being added as requirements in many institutions. The addition is most likely to be advanced exposition, but may be narrative writing or other forms of "creative" work, or may be rather intensive study of rhetorical theory and practice. A great amount of research in rhetoric is going on today, some of which has profound implications for the teaching of English. A teacher cannot be considered well qualified if he is unaware of the most important of these developments.

In literature, practical criticism is one of the most important additions. In earlier years a teacher might accumulate a large number of credits in literature courses without ever taking a course that would provide principles of criticism for practical application within the classroom. Some colleges are for the first time making available courses in world literature or comparative literature, contemporary literature, and literature for adolescents. Most colleges are taking a fresh look at their literature requirements to see whether an appropriate balance is maintained, for instance, between British and American or old and relatively new. Oral interpretation of literature, taught usually by the Speech department, is becoming recognized as a uniquely valuable course for English teachers; one mark of many superior teachers is their ability to read literature aloud with great effectiveness.

Courses in the teaching of reading, offered sometimes by departments of English but more often by education, are also being increasingly required.

In other education courses, fewer changes are observable. In many colleges and universities, especially rather small ones, one of the weakest offerings is the general methods course. Seated side by side may be prospective teachers of English, science, social studies, art, music, physical education, industrial arts, or what have you. Faced with such a conglomerate population, the instructor can do little but generalize and theorize; he cannot get down to the meat of teaching English or anything else. The general methods course, perhaps more than almost anything else, has given education courses a bad name. Some colleges today, however, despite staffing problems, are trying to offer special sections or to make some other arrangements so that rather specific instruction in methods of teaching English (or other specialized subjects) may be available.

Work in educational psychology is potentially very valuable for a teacher, but there appears to be no clear consensus as to the most suitable content for this course. As a result, many instructors and colleges follow their own inclinations, and one course or one section may be very dissimilar to another, sometimes for example devoting attention almost exclusively to tests and measurements or child development or the human nervous system, or experiments with rats and pigeons. My own opinion, for what it is worth, is that such a course is most valuable when it concerns itself with what we know about the learning process. In an institution large enough to afford multiple sections of educational psychology, a special section or sections for prospective English teachers would be worth while, with considerable attention given to existing knowledge about how children learn language and how changes in language behavior are effected.

4.

Although improvements are gradually being made in English teacher preparation, progress is slow and problems remain.

One of the problems, obviously, is how to compress so many preparatory courses into four years. If we keep adding courses, such as those in composition and language, either other courses have to be deleted, or courses have to be combined, or more time must be allowed. All three of these solutions are being tried to some extent. The MLA-NASDTEC-NCTE study does not explicitly recommend a fifth year as a prerequisite for a teaching certificate, but it does indicate strongly the need for a fifth year of work either before teaching or within a short time afterward. It also describes, as our ISCPET study is doing, some of the areas of major concern for the fifth year. Traditional MA programs are as a rule not sufficiently functional.

Another problem is that of the person who as a student takes only a minor in English and then finds himself teaching from one to five or six classes in the subject. In 1961 NCTE reported that almost exactly half of the nation's high school English teachers had no major in English. We have no up-to-date statistics for comparison, but there is no apparent evidence that the situation has noticeably improved. As a result, many English classes are taught by a person who, although often able and well-motivated, simply does not know English well enough to teach it satisfactorily. There are not enough fully qualified people to meet the need.

The answer, or an answer, to this problem lies in more and better in-service education. Large numbers of school systems have organized their own in-service programs, often with the help of nearby colleges and universities. State departments of public instruction, using USOE funds to pay part of the salaries of English specialists, are in many places providing noteworthy assistance. The NDEA institute programs and fellowship programs have also been helpful.

Still another problem in many schools has been the lack of adequate leadership in English teaching within school systems. A good supervisor or a strong department chairman can do a great deal to improve both curriculum and instruction. But such persons in the past have usually just "growed"; they

have seldom had specific training for such responsibilities. Today, some college departments of English or education or both are offering courses or programs for potential leaders on the high school level. For example, at the University of Illinois this year I have a group of twenty experienced teacher fellows, the second such group I have had, who are being groomed specifically for leadership positions.

I shall mention one more problem and then conclude. Scholarly researchers and educational technologists keep adding to the explosion of knowledge. We know more and more, and we keep getting more and more technological help, such as A-V aids, teaching machines, and programed instruction. Informing prospective and experienced teachers of the wealth they have available is difficult. Here the professional organizations like NCTE are of major assistance. Regular reading of such periodicals as the English Journal is the best way for anyone to keep informed.

To summarize what I have been trying to say, we are moving slowly but steadily ahead to provide better qualified English teachers for the junior and senior high schools. Preparation in English is making the greatest gains, but some gains, such as more specific methods courses and the use of micro-teaching, are being made in education. The problems are still numerous and difficult. Pre-service education must continue to be supplemented by in-service work, an area where the help of school administrators and school boards can be particularly beneficial.